

Alameda County Green Party Questionnaire 2014

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1. Motivation -- Why did you choose to run for School Board?

I am running for school board to bring the voice of an educator to the board; to represent teacher, student, and parent voice. I have grown up in Oakland and dedicated my career to the children in Oakland. My tenure on the Board (if I am elected) will focus on strengthening our fiscal house, increasing funding to teaching and learning, and working collaboratively with Board members to make every Oakland School a quality school. I have the endorsement of three of the sitting Board Members (Vice President James Harris, Director Roseann Torres, and Director Jumoke Hinton Hodge). I have the vision, experience, and commitment to improve our schools and our relationships. I want to see Oakland schools be a magnet that draws families to Oakland and a model for the rest of the country. This is a long sighted vision and very realistic. All the components and expertise are here in Oakland. We can do this.

2. Program and Priorities -- Elected office provides the opportunity to proactively lead by placing new ideas on the agenda for consideration and development. What are some specific ideas you intend to pursue if elected? What do you believe are the main priorities for the School Board?

My priorities are to improve teaching and learning through professional development, effective teacher evaluation, and increasing graduation rates. I am a proponent of fiscal responsibility. We have not had our financial house in order since the state takeover. While this is known by some, many parents do not know that we still have a state trustee that oversees our financial decisions or that we still owe \$60 million dollars to the state. The measure of fiscal responsibility is the ending of the trustee relationship with the state. I have a vision of Oakland Schools as world class education centers that will attract families to Oakland. This starts with the implementation of the Full Service Community Schools strategy. This requires a Board that can work collaboratively with School leadership, local service providers, families, and neighbors to transform our Schools into neighborhood centers that serve the needs of the community around it. I have the relationships to bring these stakeholders together around this common goal and the experience to navigate the landscape and reach the goal. If elected to School Board, I will be an Oakland educator making decisions, with input from the community (includes parents, unions, business owners, and others), that will right our financial house and position all Oakland Schools to provide a high quality education.

3. Qualifications -- Please give a brief summary of your background and qualifications for the office of School Board member. If you are a current School Board member, what issues can you point to in your time as Board member that have had a positive impact? As a Board member what can you tell us about your service on the Board, and share with us the decisions you have made in this capacity that you believe made a difference in the functioning of the School Board?

I began my educational career in Oakland Public Schools as a Manzanita Elementary kindergartener. School was always emphasized in my family, but my family was able to provide little support toward my academic goals. I had to do my own research and seek out mentors to learn how to successfully navigate School. By middle School, my family had moved to Texas. The education was of a higher quality and I excelled. I earned an academic scholarship to college upon high School graduation. College was challenging and motivating, but I was homesick. I returned to California in 1989. Within a year, I was back in School at Laney College and I was teaching in the afterschool program at Whittier Elementary. I had always been excited about learning as a student. At Whittier, I first experienced the joy of teaching. I decided to change my career path from Doctor to Teacher. I completed my B.A. in Sociology with a Minor in Biology at Sonoma State University. I went on to earn my Masters in Education at the University of San Francisco.

I began working in education at the age of 21 years old as an after School science teacher at Whittier Elementary School. I continued working in Oakland Schools as a teacher's aide and a classroom teacher. In my ten years as a classroom teacher, I taught in public, charter, and private Schools in Oakland and San Francisco. After ten years, I transitioned to working in community based organizations. I led employment training programs for youth and homeless adults. Over time, I shifted to administrative leadership. I gained experience supervising staff, managing budgets, and overseeing government grants. Currently, I work with juvenile justice systems to help them develop data driven approaches to reducing youth incarceration. I have demonstrated leadership in education and youth development from an early age. At the age of 23, I designed a character development program for boys called Young Lions' Lair (YLL). It provided strategies for success in the areas of health, academics, social development, relationships, and finance. When the African American male Achievement Office asked me to lead the Manhood Development Program at Oakland High School, Oakland Technical High School, and Skyline; I adapted YLL to freshmen boys. I hired, trained and supervised three instructors at the three Schools.

I was Executive Director of Leadership Excellence, a youth development organization focused on developing youth into change agents. I led the organization through the great recession of 2008. While, the organization had to scale back; we maintained the core programming and restructured the administration. Leadership Excellence continues to provide much needed services to Oakland youth.

I stepped up to fill the District 4 School Board seat in May of 2013. The appointment process was initiated after Gary Yee (School Board member, District 4) was appointed as acting superintendent. My nomination resulted in three yes votes, but I was one vote short of being appointed. As a leader in the community, I developed a relationship with the newly appointed

School Board member, Annie Campbell Washington. When she decided to run for city council, she encouraged me to run for School Board.

In February of 2014, I was appointed to the Measure G oversight committee. This committee is responsible for advising the School Board on the expenditures of the \$20 million in taxes that the District receives from Oakland residents to retain teachers, reduce class size, and maintain libraries among other priorities. I was appointed by a unanimous vote of the School Board. At the first Measure G Committee meeting, the members elected me as the Chair of the committee because of my experience with budgets, my relationships in the District, and my reputation of integrity.

4. School Ratings and Evaluations -- How do you rate the Oakland schools? Name the success and shortcomings?

I would rate the Oakland Schools a "D" due to our inability to successfully graduate a majority of the African American and Latino students; as well as the English Language Learners and those with special needs.

Our successes come from a small group of teachers, parents, administrators, and community members focused on a single school. Schools like Montclair and Sequoia Elementary are examples. The District has not figured out how to maximize the assets in the District and replicate successes at the school site level. Allendale Elementary School, which is one of the schools under the Federal Voluntary Resolution Plan (VRP), is an example of this poor replication.

5. Budget -- What changes to the OUSD budget would you suggest? (include changes to revenue).

One of my top priorities are increasing funding to teaching and learning by streamlining administrative costs and reallocating those saving to schools, teachers, and students. The District needs to improve the academic outcomes for the lowest performing students; including English Language Learners and students with special needs. I will accomplish this by requiring an internal audit of our central administration spending. The new Superintendent has already started the process of reorganizing the roles and positions of the central administration. I would support this effort and encourage the District to decrease the spending and transfer those saving to the classroom.

I want to see an increase in spending for Special Education services offered by the District. We should reduce the dollars that we are spending for outside service providers and invest in those positions within the District. For example, the District contracts with outside Speech Therapists to services. This is a high demand role that OUSD should be staffing.

I want to pay off the state loan to precipitate the District becoming fully autonomous in its decision making. The Board received limited voting power back in 2009. To date, the District still owes \$60 million dollars to the state. We have been paying down the debt at a rate of \$5 to \$ million per year. Due to this debt, the Board does not have final decision making authority over budgets; they must be approved by the state trustee.

6. LCFF & LCAP -- How do you see the impact of the new Local Control Funding Formula and the role of staff and parents/community in LCAP?

I agree with the state Local Control Funding Formula plan for local schools; it accounts for the fact that those schools needing more support should receive more dollars.

Based on the LCFF requirements, the process was not successful. Parent and community participation was minimal. The process and goals of the meetings were not articulated clearly, and next steps for the school process are not clear.

Therefore, the LCAP plan feels superficial especially compared to the descriptions of the eight priority areas and progress measures identified by the State.

7. School Closures -- What is your position on the schools which have been closed over the past several years, and the eviction of the "People's School for Public Education" at Lakeview School? What is your position on future school closures?

School closures are a complex problem. I did not agree with the way the decision making process went. Due to the District poor data systems; the community has no lead time when a school is being considered for closure. I want to see a process that allows a school to be notified at least a year in advance that they may be considered for closure. The school should receive additional district support to address specific challenges with the goal of keeping the school open if possible.

Because the District does not have a consistent and efficient way to evaluate school performance; we cannot evaluate all schools for closure; only the traditional schools. OUSD needs a process to evaluate all schools in a way that will allow us to compare "apples to apples". If a charter school is underperforming in similar ways as the traditional schools being considered for closure; those charter schools should be on the list as well.

I did not agree with the way the District forced the "People's School for Public Education" off of the Lakeview Campus. We need more parent and community participation in the decision making to minimize similar stand offs in the future.

8. Other OUSD Properties -- What are your views on the use of the District property at 1025 2nd Ave. and the future location of Dewey HS?

First, the District should not sell the property at 1025 2nd Avenue. Secondly, whatever development is approved should include central administrative office space, retail space for student run businesses, a teen/ youth center and housing prioritized for Oakland teachers. Any market rate housing should be prioritized after the above mentioned priorities. The revenue generated should be prioritized to pay down the debt and increase per pupil spending.

9. Truants and Drop-outs -- What do you suggest we do about the truants and those who have dropped out?

Truancy and dropout rates are a sign of disconnection from school, a lack of understanding of the importance of education, and poor programming within the schools.

English Language Learners have one of the highest rates of truancy in Oakland. The majority of these students speak Spanish as a primary language and over half of them are in grades K-3.

This is a crisis being created by the schools lack of language and culturally competent services.

To increase the graduation rates of OUSD students, schools need to help students connect learning to future success. I am going to propose an incentive program to offer college scholarships and union apprenticeships to high school graduates that meet the criteria. I

believe that we can find money within the District, partner with businesses in the City, and secure state funding to accomplish this incentive program.

10. Charter Schools -- What should Oakland's policy be around charter schools? What would you propose, if anything, in lieu of Charter schools? Do you distinguish between the different types? Would you support putting charter schools under the union contract?

I would evaluate every new charter School application on its merits. My top criteria for considering approval would be

- Is the charter being brought forward by local residents/ stakeholders?
- Is the School design/ pedagogical approach unique to Oakland and responsive to educational needs?
- Do they have a plan to include parents and community on the decision making body of the School?
- Will they honor the requirements to provide meeting minutes to the District?
- Are the finances secure to provide a quality education?

In regard to established charter schools, I would support them if they were fiscally sound with a transparent administration and high quality teaching and learning. This is the same standard that I would hold our District public Schools to as well. Currently, the District does not have good systems in place to accurately track attendance, measure teacher performance, assess School quality, or complete audits. This is work that the District must do; it will be valuable to all Schools in the District. Only when we are comparing apples to apples can we have a true assessment of School performance and quality.

I do distinguish between charter schools. I prefer locally developed and run charter schools that provide a specific pedagogical approach or curriculum content that is not offered by the District. As a District, we must be cautious of franchise charter schools run by corporations. I am in full support of charter schools being under union contracts if that is the will of the teachers and workers at that school.

11. Testing and Teacher Evaluations -- What should our policy be around Student Testing and Teacher Evaluation? Do you see alternatives to the use of mandated standardized tests in meeting local, state and national education goals? How much are we teaching to the test now, and what should we be doing different if you feel it should be different?

As a District, we must comply with state and federal laws requiring testing. A progressive board could opt out of some of these requirements; yet the District does not have the systems or the relationships to make these types of steps.

As policy, the District could encourage additional evaluation including the use of portfolios and other evaluations that account for the multiple intelligences that our children express. While this could be done at the school site level; the Board should prove best practice approaches and training for school sites that want to expand their evaluation tools.

The problem with standardized tests includes the fact that test scores do not measure teacher performance; they measure student learning. Because teachers do not get students' scores back in the same year and do not have access to a student's individual answers; standardized tests are useless to the teacher. Tests should be developed by teachers to reflect what they taught. Standardized tests should be limited to specific grade years and teachers should not be

teaching to these tests. Finland is the educational system model that many people point to as being so successful. They put very little emphasis on standardized tests and their students do very well on them.

12. Common Core -- What are your views on the use of the proposed Common Core curriculum?

I know from talking to teachers that it has been a challenge to learn and implement. Common Core emphasizes the process over the answer. This shift in focus has been difficult for students. Teachers are challenged to explain the new grading processes to parents and teachers are being challenged by the requirement that testing take place on a computer or tablet. In addition, this could be a huge expense to the District to ensure that every student has access to a tablet or computer.

I am apprehensive because the developers of Common Core are not educators, so I will be watching closely as it rolls out. Some states have rejected the Common Core Curriculum. That may be a course that California has to take.

13. Small Schools -- What do you think of the current Small Schools?

I agree with the idea of small class sizes. The original teacher to student ratio is one to one; mother to child. Smaller classes allow for more individualized instruction. Yet, OUSD has about 86 schools and only 35,000 students. Many classrooms are under enrolled which leads to higher expenses per school and hinders the District's ability to increase teacher salaries. Overall, the District must inspection and support for the plans and policies that it passes to insure successful implementation.

14. Central Resources -- How do you think the allocations of central resources should work and how should that relate to local school funding?

At a minimum, the OUSD budget should always comply with the state requirement to spend at least 55% on teaching and learning.

Secondly, my assessment of the budget reveals that we are spending too much money on administration. I am in support of the new superintendent's goal of restructuring the administrative organizational chart including combining and eliminating some positions. California spends \$3,500 less per pupil than the national average. We should be in conversation with the state to increase this number, but we must address it locally as well.

15. City/Government Relations -- How should the City of Oakland support the OUSD, and education in general?

The City should align its educational services funding with the educational plan of the District. The City spends considerable dollars of 0-5 year old education including Head Start. These services should be coordinated to flow from one to the other. A strong city needs a strong workforce. The City has a good idea of the type of workers that are needed in the near future. The District can provide education and vocation to prepare Oakland students for the jobs that we know are here and coming. The West Oakland Army Base development is a good example; the community benefits agreement called for all apprentice hires to be Oakland residents. Yet,

the City does not have the capacity to meet that requirement. An OUSD partnership with local unions could develop a pipeline from school halls to the union halls.

16. Police -- What is your position on Campus police? How would you create an environment where police are not needed?

I would prefer a school district that does not employ its own police force. The District should partner with the Oakland Police Department to address criminal behavior and threats to public safety in schools. Other strategies such as Positive Youth Development, restorative justice, and Community Full Service schools provide opportunities for relationship building, healing, and community input. A sense of ownership reduces youthful misbehaviors. Once students, parents, and community members see the asset value of their neighborhood school; they will want to do everything in their power to preserve and develop it.

17. Unions -- What do you think of the relationship between the OUSD and the unions? What would you propose it should be and how would you act on that?

If elected to the School Board, I will be joining a District that has tilted the scales against the workers; including teachers. Salary, working conditions, benefits, and pensions are important pieces of a quality work environment. The highest performing institutions, businesses, and Schools have workers who are happy because they are valued and they see the value they add to the bottom line. As a District we must negotiate fair contracts with our unions. We can pay workers more if we prioritize it. It should not require a grand jury finding for the District to agree to increase teacher salaries. I will be proactive in learning what the needs are of workers in the District and how the District could leverage its resources and relationships to support those needs. The relationship between the certified and classified staff is symbiotic. They need each other to effectively do their jobs. So, I think with clear communication the Board can prioritize certified staff and classified staff priorities. If the Board makes informed decisions based on the priorities "both sides" would be accepting. Where there is disagreement, we would revisit the list of priorities.

Union members should be involved in the budget process. I would request that the unions provide a report of budget priorities similar to how department staff does. I would use this advisory information to guide my budget priorities and decisions. It could be used to persuade Board colleagues to align with the union priorities. If elected, I will convene a community advisory Board (CAB) that will preview Board agendas and advise my decision on action items. This body will have union representation in addition to other community stakeholders like parents.

As a Board Member, I would do my due diligence to understand the union's demands before negotiation. I would work to resource those demands. I would communicate openly with union representation. I would lobby my colleagues to support union worker needs. Hopefully preparation and open communication would avoid an impasse. I would take a leadership role in union negotiations as a Board Member.

18. Adult Education -- What is your position on Adult Education?

Education starts at birth and does not stop until death. I am a proponent of a single educational continuum from early childhood education to adult learning. Currently the Peralta Community College system runs adult education services in Oakland. This, at one time, was run by OUSD. OUSD should partner more closely with Peralta and plan to take back the leadership of Adult Education. Adult education is an important component of the successful implementation of Full Service Community Schools.

19. Vocational Education -- What is your position Vocational Education?

I am an advocate of college and career readiness; not every career requires college. OUSD must do a better job of preparing students for the career paths that they select. In conversations with local union leadership, I have learned that they are ready to partner with the District to bring more students into the union apprenticeships. The new focus on Linked Learning is the opportunity to lift up this type of partnership.

20. 'Academics vs. Electives' -- What is the proper balance between academics and sports, arts and other electives? Do you support using organizations such as Play Works to provide sports, arts and other electives formally provided by staff before the series of cutbacks?

To be successful, we must teach the whole child. Academics should be the priority with every student graduating with the requirements to apply to the UC and State University systems. This still leaves a lot of time in a school day and school year for vocation, recreation, and electives. I am open to partnering with outside organizations to provide these valuable opportunities for students. Yet, because I see these avenues as core to the educational experience; OUSD should have a plan to provide these educational opportunities from within the District.

21. The School Day -- What is your opinion on the length of the school day and the role of before school and after school programs?

I am a proponent of the Full Service Community School strategy because it will extend the hours that the school is open and it will provide added services that students, parents, and neighbors need. This includes before school and afterschool programming, adult education, and connection to community services.

We need to get back to neighborhood schools that are community resources.

22. Accountability -- How do you propose making yourself accountable and accessible to the citizens of Oakland?

I will hold regular, monthly office hours in different location in District 4 to stay available to my constituents. I will convene a CAB that will advise my positions and decisions on Board agenda items. I will convene ad hoc CAB's to inform my position and decision on a specific issue. For example, if there was discussion to change the current pension system, I would convene local stakeholders with expertise in this area to advise my position: "Why should we not change the system? If we do, what is the best alternative out there?". The ad hoc CAB would do the research and provide compelling arguments for a position that I should take. I would be willing to take an active role in negotiations to facilitate an impasse in union negotiations.

23. Endorsements -- Who has endorsed you so far? Who do you expect to endorse you?

Partial List of Endorsers (For full list visit www.shakir-gilmore4oakland.com)

- Brotherhood of Elders Network**
- Elihu Harris**, Former Mayor, City of Oakland
- Marie Gilmore**, Mayor, City of Alameda
- Desley Brooks**, Council Member, City of Oakland
- James Harris**, Vice President, Oakland Unified School District
- Jumoke Hinton Hodge**, Director, Oakland Unified School District
- Roseann Torres**, Director, Oakland Unified School District
- William "Bill" Riley**, Trustee, Peralta Community College District
- Meredith Brown**, Trustee, Peralta Community College District
- Linda Handy**, Trustee, Peralta Community College District
- Greg Hodge**, Former Director, Oakland Unified School District
- Alice Spearman**, Former Director, Oakland Unified School District
- Sylvester Hodges**, Former Director, Oakland Unified School District
- Oscar Wright**, Community Advocate
- Melissa Russo**, Director of Institutional Advancement, Chabot Space and Science Center
- Arnold Perkins**, Director (retired), Alameda Co. Public Health Department
- Van Jones**, President, Rebuild the Dream
- Gay Plair Cobb**, Director, Oakland Private Industry Council
- Howard Jordan**, Chief (retired), Oakland Police Department
- Dr. Wade Nobles**, Professor Emeritus, SFSU
- Melanie Shelby**, Business Owner and former candidate for City Council, District 4
- Geoffrey Peete**, Business Owner
- Elizabeth Gilmore**, Former Candidate, School Board, District 6
- Dr. Kitty Kelly Epstein**, Professor, Holy Names University
- Margaret Gordon**, Former Commissioner, the Port of Oakland
- George Galvis**, Community Member
- Clifford Gilmore**, Community Organizer, Tenderloin Housing Clinic
- Shonda Scott**, Community Member
- Dr. Fred Blackwell, Sr.**, Physician (retired)
- Terrance Holliday**, Teacher, Rudsdale School

I am waiting to hear from a few organizations about their endorsement decisions. I will not speculate which I think I will receive. I will keep my endorsement page updated as I am notified.

24. Campaign Funding -- How much money do you currently have for this race? How much money do you plan to raise? Where will the money come from? Describe sources of financial contributions for your campaign that you would refuse to accept (if any).

We have raised approximately \$10,000 to date with half of that on hand. We plan to raise a total of \$50,000. Most of my campaign contributions have come from individual supporters. That continues to be the strategy moving forward. We have held and have scheduled creative fundraisers to reach this goal. As we secure organizational endorsements, we will account for their level of support and adjust our goal accordingly.

25. Anything Else? -- Is there anything else you would like us to know about you?

Oakland students need an Oakland educator on the School Board. I am the only candidate with years of teaching experience in Oakland; as well as experience training teachers within the District and at the university level. Parents, teachers, and students need a voice on the Board. I will be that voice.